Arleigh Burke–class guided-missile destroyer USS *Decatur* operations officer answers questions during port visit in Chennai, India, to commemorate Women's History Month (U.S. Navy/Jennifer A. Villalovos)

The Counterproductive "Sea of Sameness" in PME

By Joan Johnson-Freese, Ellen Haring, and Marybeth Ulrich

In his 2012 Mission Command White Paper, General Martin Dempsey highlighted the "increasingly competitive and interconnected" world and noted the commander's need for "mental agility."[1] He also emphasized the role education plays in developing mental agility. Additionally, in a 2013 interview on National Public Radio, General Dempsey stated that he foresees "a military that has to adapt to a changing world, [and] not just a socially changing world but literally a demographically changing world."[2] In terms of how those changes would affect military recruitment, he stated, "we're going to need to attract as much diversity and as much talent as we can possibly attract."[3]

Diversity is important not because of some sense of entitlement or to meet potentially self-imposed minimal quotas, but because of the value that multiple perspectives bring to any learning organization. Alex Pentland, named by *Forbes* as one of the seven most powerful data scientists in the world and director of the

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT's) Human Dynamics Laboratory, recently wrote about the value of diversity in *Wired*:

The collective intelligence of a community comes from idea flow; we learn from the ideas that surround us, and others learn from us. . . . When the flow of ideas incorporates a constant stream of outside ideas as well, then the individuals in the community make better decisions than they could on their own. Diversity of viewpoint and experience is an important success factor when harvesting innovative ideas.[4]

Table. Number and Percentage of Female PME Faculty in Academic Year 2013–2014

Service	Senior Service School	Command and Staff College
Navy	27 (8 percent)	27 (8 percent)
Army	7 (7.5 percent)	X (5 percent) (in 2012)
Air Force	2 (3 percent)	11 (9 percent)
Marine Corps	1 (9 percent)	2 (5 percent)

Note: Accurate statistics were difficult to compile. We gathered these data from senior Service school Web sites and information provided by faculty at the institutions. Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) numbers, for example, were provided by a faculty member. Data at all institutions, however, often include multiple positions categorized as "faculty," which are actually largely staff positions. Slightly higher numbers (14 percent) are given for ACSC (available at <www.au.af.mil/au/cf/au_catalog_2012-13/AU-10_Catalog_2012-2013.pdf>). Naval War College percentages would decrease by about 50 percent if primarily staff positions were eliminated. Additionally, the numbers for both the Navy senior Service school and its command and staff college are identical as the same faculty members teach in both.

In the corporate world, research is increasingly showing that companies with a critical mass of women executives financially outperform their peers. This has led to a movement across the business world to get more women on corporate boards, in executive positions, and in employee ranks in general. Numerous studies have shown that organizations must be comprised of at least one-third women in leadership roles, a *critical mass*, to benefit from the diverse qualities women bring to organizations.[5] More than 40 years ago, Harvard researcher Rosabeth Moss Kanter argued that once a critical mass of women was reached within an organization, "people would stop seeing them as women and start evaluating their work as managers. In short, they would be regarded equally."[6]

While diverse perspectives seem recognized as essential for complex decisionmaking and improving the performance of organizations, and while diverse thinking has the support of senior military leadership, it is sorely lacking in professional military education (PME) institutions where higher learning actually takes place. Minority faculty representation is below 10 percent at both mid- and senior-grade Service schools.

These numbers might be compared to civilian academic institutions where representation of women, for example, ranges between 30 and 40 percent of full-time faculty positions. Minority percentages among the student population at these institutions range between 7.3 and 15 percent, decreasing at senior Service schools where fewer women meet the rank qualifications.[7] At the U.S. Army War College, for example, there were 28 female students out of 385 in the 2013–2014 class, or 7.3 percent. By contrast there were 77 international officers, or 20 percent of the class. Therefore, data show that PME institutions fall far short of meeting this leadership critical mass benchmark for both students and faculty.

The comparative lack of diversity—the ubiquitous "sea of sameness"—among and between faculty and students results in a learning environment not aligned with the intent of senior leadership.[8] More importantly, it falls short in providing students with the education they will need for future decisionmaking in complex environments.

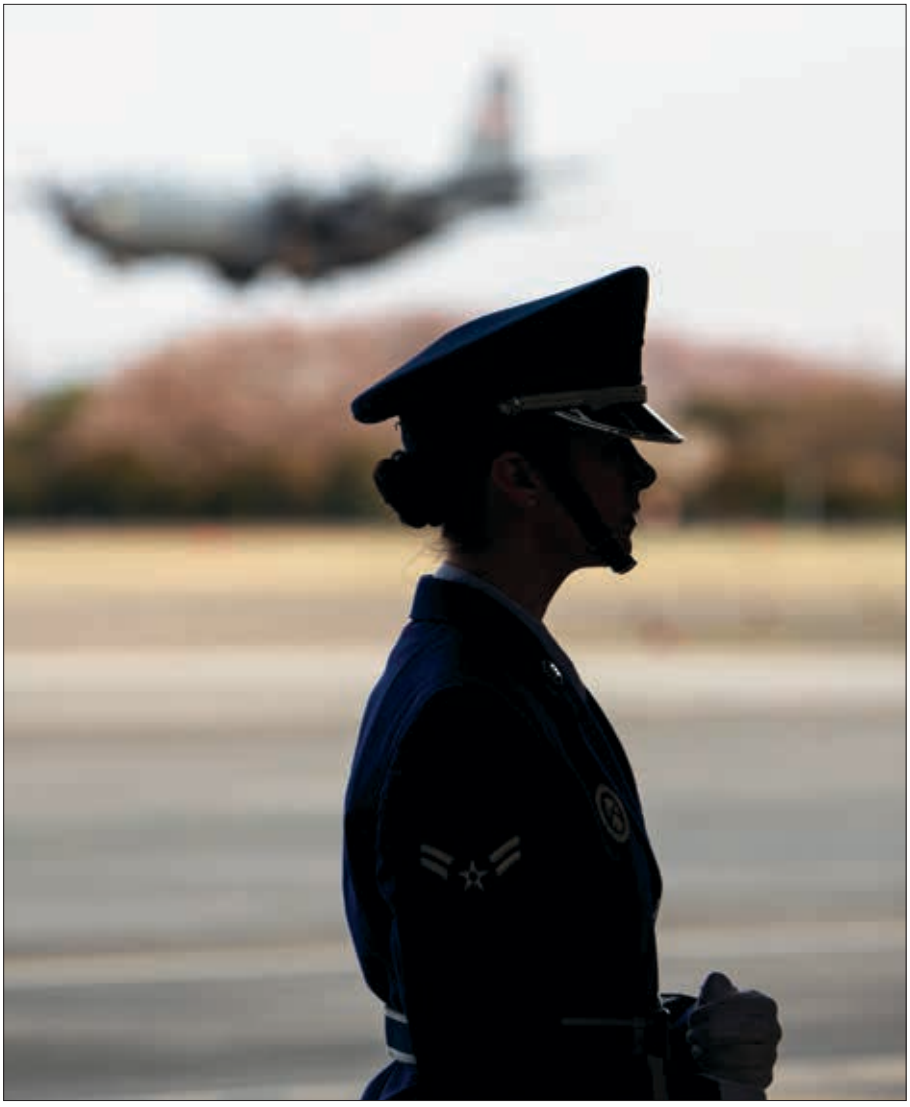
U.S. military members at all ranks are increasingly required to work with civilians, civilian institutions, and civilian communities, from villagers in Afghanistan, to aid workers in Africa, to contractors and the interagency community in Washington, DC. While military personnel are fully trained for their operational careers, they may lack education for "contextual intelligence," which Harvard Professor Joseph Nye argues is essential for effective leadership in complex environments. This is at least partly due to insufficient exposure to differing perspectives on everything from worldview to work habits. The reasons and consequences for this gap in education are important concerns that will affect future leadership and U.S. national security.

Our aim is to begin to unpack some of the ramifications of and reasons behind the sea of sameness in PME. While lack of diversity between faculty and students is a problem, this article focuses primarily but not exclusively on the faculty and on sex simply as a starting point for discussion. Hiring and retention issues regarding race and ethnicity are analogous, however. Why there are not more minority faculty is a function of structural issues, hiring practices, and work environment.

The Imperative for Diversity

The value added by women to group problem-solving has been documented in multiple studies, including a 2010 survey coauthored by MIT, Carnegie Mellon University, and Union College.[9] The importance of an accepting work environment both to the performance of minorities and consequently to the benefits of diverse perspectives in learning environments has been considered as well.[10] Therefore, if diversity of thought and perspective is valued, as General Dempsey states it must be, it is incumbent on PME administrators to ensure that a learning environment that includes diverse perspectives is created and maintained.

With a faculty comprised largely of white males over 40 (many closer to 60), including a significant portion of men who retired from the military directly to the civilian faculty, new blood is often lacking and an echo chamber of perspectives is created. As one Naval War College (NWC) graduate put it, "The NWC has



Airman 1st Class waits for moment to present Colors at Yokota Air Base, Japan (U.S. Air Force/ Osakabe Yasuo)

fallen into the 'old boys club' of keeping tenured instructors well beyond their ability to contribute with any relevancy to the service member of today's military."[11] While the Naval War College does not have a tenure policy, it is correct that longevity is the rule rather than the exception, and this becomes especially problematic when someone is hired for his or her operational experience, which tends to have a short half-life.

Another NWC graduate comment raises the issue of perspectives and the signaling that occurs from lack of minority professors on staff:

I think there is value in diversity. There were not many minority professors on the staff at NWC. I think this is a problem. This is a problem not simply because of representation, but because of perspective. There also needs to be a concerted effort to recruit more minorities as students as well. The importance of diversity among the staff is important for the development of junior officers. If we teach that diversity is important but do not practice it within our senior ranks or in a faculty, then it is not important!

Similarly, a female Army War College student stated that she was surprised at the small number of female civilian faculty given the large number of civilian faculty overall. She added, "This representation sends the message that [women] do not have the required experience or expertise to teach—they make great librarians." The student noted too that although a large number of class-wide lectures had already occurred, only two women were among the presenters, both from outside the institution:

This gives me the impression that sexism exists and we "The Army" still have a long way to go. Change begins at the top and the War College is the pinnacle of the Army's professional military education system, which is definitely not leading the way and sending the wrong message to the next generation of Army leaders and the Army at large.[12]

Lack of diversity has other downsides as well. West Point economics professor Terry Babcock-Lumish drew analogies between teaching at West Point and Hogwarts in a 2013 *New York Times* editorial. Citing the 1993 Defense Department report "Blend of Excellence" calling for the integration of civilian academics into PME, she discusses how cadets identifying individuals by displayed tribal markings such as rank, awards, or units on uniforms can create an oversimplified sense of confidence about what military cadets and consequently officers "know" about individuals—military and civilian. Cadets cared about what officers thought of them for good reason, making civilians in the company of officers "invisible." This inculcated a disregard for civilian input, she posits, which then gets extended into other situations:

When I was studying overseas in the midst of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, dinner party discussions inevitably turned to United States foreign policy. So often civilians, American and non-[Americans], *posed questions to military guests. Rare was the occasion when service members queried civilians, as if by having once been a civilian, all was immediately understood.*[13]

The argument is often made that the military is no longer sequestered on military bases but largely lives out in the civilian population (as least in

the continental United States) and is therefore integrated into civil society. Yet studies repeatedly show significant differences. The military has its own universal medical system, grocery stores, and housing arrangements. More important, their operational jobs are largely within military confines, limiting work situations so different perspectives are rarely encountered.

But not everyone sees value in diversity. When the Pentagon's Chief Personnel and Readiness Officer Jessica Wright spoke in October 2013 about diversity and inclusion as being critical to mission success, her remarks were printed on the *National Review Online* Web site and drew 1,055 comments. Although there were a few attempts to point out that diversity brings valuable perspectives to decisionmaking, they were overwhelmingly drowned out by ad hominem attacks and just plain prejudice and ignorance.[14]

Faculty Recruitment and Hiring

George Reed recently published an article in this journal about faculty management challenges at a war college.[15] Dr. Reed, a retired Army colonel and Army War College instructor, and currently an associate dean at the University of San Diego, writes with substantial credibility about the mixed cultural environment of a war college. Having served as an officer in the military and then transitioning to a career in academia, he recognizes each as a profession with cultural expectations and norms and as deserving professional respect. After reviewing the multiple issues challenging PME, Reed chose to focus on faculty talent management. His rationale is important:

It is appropriate to focus on the concept of academic talent management because of the centrality of the quality of the faculty to the effectiveness of any educational institution. This concept seems to be lost on some administrators in military organizations.[16]

He examined seven ways that PME is disadvantaged in the marketplace for academic talent. A corollary but unaddressed aspect of Reed's important and accurate consideration of recruitment and retention issues is whom PME institutions tend to recruit.

Regarding sex, the administrative rationale often given for why there are so few female teaching faculty is that it is a "structural" issue. PME faculty positions are argued to require academic "generalists" rather than "specialists," with women purportedly tending toward specializations. Consequently, it is reasoned, few qualified women applied for or were assigned teaching positions. In reality few male applicants are generalists either, but they expand their expertise on the job. However, it certainly is the case that the number of female teaching faculty applicants has been lower than men. And even when qualified women do apply, there are still multiple hurdles to overcome.

The "best athlete" approach to hiring is often used in both the public and private sectors. In PME, best athlete candidates are considered to be those possessing a broad range of educational attributes and professional experience in the military or the security field. Far fewer minority candidates are statistically likely to possess this combination of attributes, thereby potentially disadvantaging or eliminating many otherwise highly qualified individuals. Pentland suggests an alternative to the best athlete hiring approach:

The most consistently creative and insightful people are explorers. They spend an enormous amount of time seeking out new people and different ideas, without necessarily trying very hard to find the "best" people or the "best" ideas. Instead they seek out people with different views and different ideas.[17]

"Different," however, does not appear to be a quality actively sought by PME institutions.

There are often even fewer female Active-duty faculty members, and fewer female retired military officers who are subsequently hired as civilian professors. Occasionally, a female officer will be assigned to a department teaching history, economics, foreign policy, international relations, leadership, or some similar field. She will face all the same handicaps as male officers in similar billets—either not being familiar with the subject matter or not having teaching experience—and potentially a sex bias as well. Female Active-duty officers have recently been assigned to departments teaching in traditionally all-male departments because the "sea of sameness" was so stark. When hiring civilians for those billets, however, the traditional profile is that of a postcommand O-6 with operational experience, a profile less likely to fit many women. Whether there are other equally valuable professional profiles in areas populated by more women seems rarely considered.

Fostering a Climate of Professional Satisfaction

At the individual level in environments where diversity is low, the perception is that diversity is not valued, so subtle mistreatments are overlooked or tolerated. Female faculty members report that their perceived marginalization contributes to a climate where they must fight for respect even from their students, and their academic contributions are undervalued. That kind of a climate affects health and performance.[18]

Research indicates that women employed in institutions lacking the organizational characteristics and individual leadership behaviors to create environments where diversity is valued become frustrated because they might not reach their full potential.[19] Those who do not see other women being promoted to senior leadership positions not only lack mentors and advocates for their own promotion but also come to believe that promotion is not possible. These attitudes harden over time. The result is often the decision to seek employment elsewhere, further thinning the ranks of this underrepresented minority. Institutions without a record of appointing women to faculty posts in significant numbers or seldom promoting those few who do make it into the ranks make

it more difficult to attract high quality faculty.

Having the importance of diversity *practiced* by faculty and within the senior ranks is important. So too is evidencing it within those ranks. For example, the Army War College has not had a woman (civilian or military) serve as commandant, provost, dean, department chair, or in any director-level position. Having a woman in a PME leadership position, however, does not in and of itself ensure either a critical mass of minority faculty or an environment conducive to creating such, as a female provost currently serves at the Naval War College.

Perhaps an even more damaging aspect of inappropriate attitudes and behavior is the perceived acceptance by administrators. A comment from a Naval War College graduate is illustrative of the attitudes and behavior female faculty and students can face: "I continue to be disgruntled over the failure of the NWC leadership to respond appropriately to the fact that I was pregnant during my course of study, including inappropriate and misogynistic behavior by some professors and their supervisors." That this attitude and behavior occurs is bad—but what is much worse, at least in the view of this student, is that it is tolerated.

For female faculty, this tolerance of inappropriate attitudes and behavior, or seeing only perfunctory efforts to change the status quo, can grate over time and affect retention. The Army War College commandant (equivalent to a college president) gave his direct endorsement this academic year to an informal support group for female faculty and students that had formed over the years, the so-called Women of the College, so a channel exists for serious grievances. However, it has not yet been used for the day-to-day experiences and environmental issues described here.

Some behavior raises such offense among female faculty and students (in the above case, among many males as well) that it cannot be ignored, such as in 2010 when a Naval War College professor gave an in-house presentation at an ethics conference including references to rape that ended up on YouTube, though it was later removed.[20] But the standard administrative approach to dealing with such occurrences is to schedule a mandatory 1-hour all-hands presentation in the college auditorium, often consisting of a canned presentation of little value or given by a well-meaning but irrelevant speaker, that merely serves to anger those innocent of any wrongdoing, and subsequently worsens the environment.

It should be noted that statistically the NWC can certainly boast that it "fosters an atmosphere that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds." In fact, the responses on several graduate surveys place 100 percent of the responses in a 4–7 range on a 7-point scale for that question, though it has dropped to as low as 84 percent. But with a minority student population under 10 percent and typically around 50 graduates responding, it is unlikely that many minority responses were included. Clearly, the vast majority of NWC students are pleased with their overall educational experience.

Work Environment Ramifications: Tokenism

There is considerable commonality between work environment issues minority faculty encounter and those of minority students. In the case of female students, they are often concerned about complaints negatively affecting their grades. Student complaints taken to administrators on a nonattribution basis are largely dismissed.

A comment from an NWC alumna highlights how this situation can affect student grading, illustrated by her own "ever so slightly low class participation grade, which edged me out of graduating with honors . . . [though] I received top marks on the blind-graded exams and papers." An explanation given for why women often get lower class participation grades is that they do not have the command experience that men do, so their class contributions are viewed as less valuable. This is a commonly experienced phenomenon of minority groups and not reflective of actual talents.

An Army War College student commented on the fact that most seminars had only one female student, saying, "to participate, you have to be 'one of the guys' or be willing to be more aggressive and jump into debates where it may be 1 [woman] against several [men] who have different perceptions."[21] A classmate added,

I felt I was the token [woman] *in my seminar and had to defend my position repeatedly, unlike being just another guy in the seminar. If I remained quiet, then I was being a bitch or being hard to deal with. I would have preferred at least one other* [woman] *in the seminar if nothing else just to have added support.*[22]

This is not a problem limited to PME. The Harvard Business School recently tackled the issue. The university leadership was concerned with the disparity between entry-level qualifications and exit-level records of women. Specifically, women whose earlier academic and leadership qualifications were on par with their male classmates were graduating at the bottom of their classes: "Women at Harvard did fine on tests. But they lagged badly in class participation, a highly subjective measure that made up 50 percent of each final mark." The school installed observers in the backs of classrooms to coach students and faculty alike. They found that women were less likely to engage in debate because when they did they were often ignored by professors or talked over by their male classmates.

The observers noted these discrepancies and took corrective action with both faculty and students. At the end of the study it was clear that the interventions had made a difference: "The cruel classroom jokes, along with other forms of intimidation, were far rarer," and women's standings significantly improved. As one professor put it, "sunshine is the best disinfectant." Harvard is in the process of making many changes to ensure that the lessons revealed by this study are imbedded in its institution. Specifically, Harvard is intent on recruiting and training a more diverse faculty, which is already far more diverse, at 30 percent, than any of the PME institutions.[23] This case study

is particularly relevant as senior PME institutions often compare themselves to professional studies programs rather than liberal arts programs.

While female officers arriving at PME institutions with less experience than their male counterparts might have been typical in the past, an increasing number sent by the Services do have significant command experience. Furthermore, if women and minorities are made to feel undervalued, they often contribute less, affecting not only their grades, but also the value they are likely to add to class discussions.

Female students and faculty are reluctant to speak out to higher authorities if the environment is deemed hostile because they are rightly concerned that they could end up being dubbed "the problem." Both groups work hard for acceptance among their male counterparts and do not want to be seen as troublemakers. In the case of female faculty members, the vast majority are on 3-year renewable contracts and concerned that complaints could get them deemed "not collegial" and affect contract renewal.

Technical Sergeant Liesbeth Watson, professional military education instructor at Airey NCO Academy, Tyndall Air Force Base (U.S. Air Force)

Conclusion and Recommendations

A 2013 *Forbes* article considered the boundaries between military leadership and creative leadership, arguing that those boundaries are not as clear-cut as one might imagine. The author suggests six shared priorities for both communities: "To solve the most complex problems, leaders need to engage multiple, diverse perspectives. The assumption here, essential to the successful operation of learning organizations, is that we have the most to learn from those who are least like us."[24] Yet there is little evidence that prioritizing diversity has been accepted within the very organizations charged with educating future military leaders. We have also argued that quality female faculty are unlikely to be recruited and retained if they perceive that they are destined for a marginal existence within their institutions.

If military leadership really wants diversity at academic institutions that exist to prepare officers for the future, it will have to actively assure that more than rhetoric and box-checks are completed at lower levels. Critical mass is a concept widely accepted in the civilian world and must be adopted within the military as well. Acceptance of diversity as a desirable premise, for the variety of perspectives that come as a consequence, cannot be dictated or learned from passive lectures from the stage. It will require a culture change, and culture changes come through leadership and demonstrated commitment to ensuring that the leadership ranks as well as the rank and file increasingly include more women.

Jörg Muth, author of *Command Culture*, which the commandant of the Marine Corps made required reading for all intermediate officers, recently wrote about what he calls a crisis in command, including "mediocre faculty and harsh commanders at military schools."[25] He states, "Those who carry, perpetuate, and disseminate culture in an army are the senior commanders and the fixed military installations, like military academies and schools." Culture is as much or more the issue behind the lack of diversity as structure.

An influential study aimed at correcting the sex gap across industry sectors recommends that one "cannot change the corporate culture and the way things work unless [one has] enough people with the will to change in a position to do it."[26] Change will not occur unless current leaders act to increase the numbers of women in faculty leadership positions and in faculty positions at large. Effective strategies include setting targets and timelines to meet diversity goals and impose consequences for missing the targets.[27] Other accountability tools include ensuring that search committee "long lists" are comprised of at least one woman candidate (30 percent is the recommended number for corporate board searches), with committees having to justify why they fell short of the benchmark.[28] Furthermore, leaders' performance evaluations should be tied to progress toward meeting the benchmarks. PME institutions are subject to multiple oversight bodies, including Congress and Boards of Visitors. These bodies can be effective tools to monitor the rate of progress toward achieving diversity benchmarks.

In the senior leadership course taught at NWC, several case studies of culture change are considered, including Admiral Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt, Jr.,

and businessman Lou Gerstner, who is best known for the culture change he led at IBM, which saved the company. We have our officers study how to propagate culture changes when necessary, but there appears to be resistance to practicing what is taught. This resistance will be abated only by strong internal leadership or when externally dictated. The better option seems to be dealing with it internally. **JFQ**

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